

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

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AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 2393

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, ET (YOHANNES, ACTING PATRIARCH)

SUBJ: ABUN YOHANNES, ACTING PATRIARCH: SOME QUESTIONS AND SOME
COMMENTS

REF: ADDIS 2086, ADDIS ABABA 2087

1. REFTELS REPORTED AND COMMENTED ON THE APPOINTMENT OF
THE ABUN (BISHOP) YOHANNES AS ACTING PATRIARCH OF THE
ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH VICE THE ABUN TEWOFLOS WHO WAS
DEPOSED AND IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED BY THE DIRG.
WE ARE TRYING TO OBTAIN AN OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY OF YOHANNES
AND WILL TRANSMIT IT WHEN IT IS RECEIVED. THIS MESSAGE
DEALS WITH SOME OF THE QUESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS RAISED
BY THE APPOINTMENT OF AN ACTING PATRIARCH.

A. LEGITMACY. THE CROWN HAS LONG BEEN THE PROTECTOR
OF THE CROSS IN ETHIOPIA AND EMPERORS HAVE NORMALLY
MANIPULATED APPOINTMENTS TO THE HOLY SYNOD WITH GREATER
OR LESSER SUCCESS. TRADITIONALLY, THE MAN (ALWAYS A
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FOREIGNER) WHO WAS TO SIT UPON THE ETHIOPIAN EPISCOPAL

THRONE WAS SELECTED IN EGYPT BY THE ALEXANDRINE SEE OF ST. MARK, UNTIL THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (EOC) BECAME AUTOCEPHALOUS FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II. THEREAFTER, IT WAS THE HOLY SYNOD OF ETHIOPIA WHICH SELECTED CANDIDATES FOR THE PAPACY OF THE EOC FROM WHICH THE EMPEROR CHOSE ONE. ALTHOUGH TEWOFLOS WAS ONLY THE SECOND INCUMBENT SO CHOSEN, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT THE SYNOD HAD A MAJOR ROLE IN THE PRIMATE'S SELECTION AND DISMISSAL. IN TERMINATING THE REIGN OF TEWOFLOS SO UNILATERALLY THE DIRG, SECULAR SUCCESSION - DIGLQITY TO THE CROWN THUS WENT CLEARLY BEYOND ITS PERVIEW. IN SELECTING THE TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT FOR TEWOFLOS IT DID SO AGAIN.

MUCH WILL NOW DEPEND UPON THE PERHAPS DELAYED REACTION OF THE HOLY SYNOD TO THE DIRG'S UNILATERAL ACTIONS, AND THE ELECTION (SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE "BEFORE JULY 7, 1976") OF THE NEW PATRIARCH. IF, AS ANTICIPATED, THE HOLY SYNOD PROVES COMPLIANT AND THE ELECTION IS HELD IN ACCORDANCE WITH CHURCH TRADITION, THE DIRG'S HIGHHANDED ACTADON WILL PROBABLY BE ACCEPTED AS PERHAPS AN EVANESCENT REVOLUTIONARY DISTORTION. IF IT IS NOT, MANY MAY QUESTION ETH EPMG'S INTENTIONS TOWARD THE EOC, I.E. THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE IN SOCIALIST ETHIOPIA. IN THE LAITY, THE LOW REGARD IN WHICH TEWOFLOS WAS WIDELY HELD OPERATES IN FAVOR OF INITIAL ACCEPTANCE OF THIS LATEST DIRG UKASE BY ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIANS, AT LEAST AMONG THE ELITE. THE REACTION OF RURAL CHRISTIANS, PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTHERN CHRISTIAN PROVINCES, WILL BEAR WATCHING. WE BELIEVE THAT ALTHOUGH THESE CHRISTIANS ARE GENERALLY LESS EDUCATED AND LESS KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT TEWOFLOS' VULNERABILITIES, THEY ARE WELL AWARE THAT HE FAILED TO SUPPORT HAILE SELASSIE IN THE CRUNCH AND THINK BADLY OF HIM FOR THAT REASON.

B. WHY YOHANNES? THERE ARE QUESTIONS WHICH ARISE WITH THE DIRG'S CHOICE OF THIS ERITREAN -BORN TIGRE. WAS HE SELECTED PRIMARILY TO PLEASE THE NORTH AND REASSURE THE STRONGLY CHRISTIAN ABYSSINIAN PROVINCES (GOJJAM, BEG EMDIR, TRIGRE, ERITREA) INCREASINGLY AFFECTED BY DISSIDENCE? OR DID THE DIRG INTEND TO EXTRACT THIS REPORTEDLY STRONG MINDED PRELATE FROM HIS HOME ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH HE MAY HAVE BEEN DEEMED DANGEROUS OF POTENTIALLY SO TO BRING HIM

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UNDER ITS CLOSER OVERSIGHT IN THE LESS CONGENIAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE CAPITAL WHERE HE IS A STRANGER? THESE QUESTIONS MAY LOSE SOME OF THEIR ACUITY IF IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT YOHANNES' TASK IS INDEED ONLY THAT OF AN INTERIM "ACTING" HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

C. WHO IS YOHANNES? WE STILL LACK MOST BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS. MEANWHILE, YOHANNES IS DESCRIBED TO US BY RELEVANT SOURCES WHICH WE HAVE THUS FAR BEEN ABLE TO REACH AS

COURAGEOUS, ASCETIC, AND SCHOLARLY, WITH A CLASSIC
ETHIOPIAN RELIGIOUS AND AN ITALIAN EDUCATION. HE IS SAID TO
BE A MAN OF POWERFUL CONVICTIONS. HE REPORTEDLY OPPOSED
THE EMPEROR OVER THE SELECTION OF TEWOFLOS AS PRIMATE,
IN PRIVATE HE IS SAID TO HAVE TOLD THE EMPEROR
THAT TEWOFLOS WAS THE
WRONG MAN FOR THE JOB. IN PUBLIC
HE LEFT TEWOFLOS' CONSECRATION CEREMONY BEFORE
ITS COMPLETION TO INDICATE THIS OPINION. AFTER THE
EMPEROR WAS DEPOSED AND IMPRISONED HE IS SAID TO HAVE
DEMANDED OF THE DIRG TO RELEASE HIM AND REPORTEDLY SPENT A
DAY WITH THE OLD MAN WHOM HE CONTINUED OPENLY TO ESTEEM.
AT FIRST GLANCE, THEREFORE, YOHANNES MAY PROVE LESS EASY
FOR DIRG TO MANAGE-- IF THAT IS ITS INTENTION-- THAN WAS
HIS PREDECESSOR. LASTLY, YOHANNES IS SAID TO FEEL THAT
TEWOFLOS USURPED THE AUTHORITY OF THE HOLY SYNOD. WE
WOULD THUS EXPECT HIM TO HAVE THE SYNOD'S SUPPORT IF HE
MOVES TO STRENGTHEN ITS AUTHORITY. INITIAL COMMENTS
WHICH APPEARED IN THE PRESS ON FEB. 24 SUGGEST THAT THIS
IS INDEED ONE OF HIS OBJECTIVES.
HUMMEL

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